February 13, 2003

Dear Interested Public Land User,

On August 22, 2002, President Bush established the Healthy Forests Initiative directing the Department of Agriculture, Department of Interior, and the Council of Environmental Quality to improve regulatory processes to assure more timely decisions, greater efficiency, and better results in reducing the risks of catastrophic wildfires. The **Pahvant Interagency Fuels Reduction Project**, located in west central Utah, is one of more than ten national pilot projects selected to spearhead the President's Initiative.

Proposed Action

The Fillmore Ranger District of the Fishlake National Forest (NF), and the Fillmore Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) are proposing to cut and burn hazardous fuel accumulations along the western slopes of the Pahvant Mountain Range (Front Range). The projects are located east of Interstate 15, between Fillmore and Richfield, and extending from Scipio to Meadow, Utah. This project is coordinated between the Fishlake NF, BLM, Utah Division of Forestry, Fire & State Lands, and communities within Millard County. Enclosed are a map and detailed description of the Proposed Action. More detailed maps can be viewed at the Richfield Interagency Fire website at www.fs.fed.us/r4/rifc/ and will also be made available at the following locations:

- Fishlake NF Supervisor's Office, 115 East 900 North, Richfield, UT
- Fillmore Ranger Station, 390 S. Main, Fillmore, UT
- Fillmore BLM Field Office in Fillmore, 35 East 500 North

Background

There is a need for reduced probability of catastrophic wildfire and secondary effects, such as flooding, along the Pahvant Front Range near the wildland/urban interface communities of Scipio, Holden, Fillmore, and Meadow. To this end, the proposed action is to reduce hazardous fuels by reducing fuel height and fuel loads. The areas proposed for treatment have an existing fuel height of more than 8 feet, and a fuel loading of over 15 tons per acre. The desired condition is a fuel height of 0-2 feet, and a fuel loading of less than 5 tons per acre.

Over the last ten years there have been numerous large uncharacteristic wildfires along the Pahvant Front Range. Almost one-half of lightning caused fires on the Fishlake NF occur in this area. It experiences a ten-year average of 31 lightning caused fires per year, and has resulted in hundreds of thousands of dollars in fire suppression and burn rehabilitation costs over the last few years.

In 1996 the Adelaide wildfire burned approximately 15,000 acres near Kanosh, which later resulted in flooding to farmlands and damage to hay crops. A bridge, fisheries structures, and fences were also damaged on National Forest System lands. Fire suppression costs exceeded $4 million dollars, while emergency burn rehabilitation costs exceeded one-quarter of a million dollars.

In August 2000 the Swain's wildfire burned about 7,700 acres along the Pahvant Front Range. The wildfire threatened several structures in the area. Later that summer and in the summer of 2001 heavy

thunderstorms resulted in flood damage to Holden. Several homes were damaged by the movement of sediment into their basements. A Forest Service road and campground were also damaged. Suppression costs exceeded $2.1 million dollars, while emergency burn rehabilitation costs are now well over $1 million dollars and rising, as the need for additional rehabilitation measures continues.

Decision Framework

The Fillmore District Ranger and Fillmore Field Office Manager will decide whether or not to implement the proposed action or as modified by any mitigation measures. The Forest Service and BLM will issue separate decisions for their respective areas of land management. We do not expect the proposed action would require an amendment to the Fishlake NF Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) or BLM Warm Springs Resource Management Plan.

Preliminary Identification of Issues

The Interdisciplinary Team has identified preliminary issues. A key issue related to inventoried roadless areas (IRA) is described below. Please describe additional issues that we have not identified. These issues would be evaluated during the environmental analysis for the proposed project.

- IRA Issue statement: The Horse Hollow, Meadow, Pioneer, and Wild Goose treatment units contain inventoried roadless areas. Although the proposed action does not include any new road construction, the proposed treatments could result in short-term temporary effects to roadless characteristics. Roadless characteristics that could be potentially affected include soil, water, and air quality; diversity of plant and animal communities; landscape character and scenic integrity; and traditional cultural properties and sacred sites.

As part of the environmental analysis process, effects to the following resource conditions would also be disclosed:

- soil
- water resources
- vegetation/fuels
- heritage resources
- air quality and smoke management
- plant and wildlife Management Indicator Species (MIS)
- threatened, endangered and sensitive plant and wildlife species

Providing Comments

We are requesting your comments and concerns to help develop the basis on which to make an informed decision on this proposal. Your comments will help us identify and refine significant issues and analyze the effects of the proposed action. Please be as specific as possible in expressing your comments or concerns so that we can more effectively address them.

Comments received, including the names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this project, and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR 215. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 11.27 (d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting

such confidentiality should be aware that, under FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and if denied, the Agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address within five days.

Comments should be sent to Fishlake National Forest, Attn: Diane Freeman, 115 East 900 North, Richfield, UT 84701. Although your comments are always welcome, comments received by March 12, 2003 will be most useful.

Public Meeting

We will be holding a public meeting at 7:00 p.m. on February 20, 2003 at the Millard High School to discuss our proposal and obtain public comments. Meeting location is 35 North 200 West, Fillmore, UT in the cafeteria room.

For more information about this proposal, please contact BLM Project Leader Glen Nebeker, Fillmore Field Office, 35 East 500 North, Fillmore, UT, 84631, phone: (435) 743-3100, or Fishlake NF Project Leader Diane Freeman, 115 East 900 North, Richfield, UT 84701, phone: (435) 896-9233.

Sincerely,

_____	_____
ROBERT S. GARDNER	REX ROWLEY
District Ranger	Field Manager
Fillmore Ranger District	Fillmore Field Office
Fishlake National Forest	Bureau of Land Management

Proposed Action Description

The Fillmore Ranger District of the Fishlake National Forest (NF), and the Fillmore Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) are proposing to treat approximately 16,000 acres of hazardous fuel accumulations along the western slopes of the Pahvant Mountain Range (Front Range). Treatments would occur in seven treatment units ranging from approximately 490 to 4,935 acres in size. Vegetation to be treated includes sagebrush-grasslands, pinyon-juniper, gambel oak, and mountain brush.

The proposed action is to reduce hazardous fuels by reducing fuel height and fuel loads. The areas proposed for treatment have an existing fuel height of more than 8 feet, and a fuel loading of over 15 tons per acre. The desired condition is a fuel height of 0-2 feet, and a fuel loading of less than 5 tons per acre. Treatment methods include cutting vegetation by hand, piling or scattering cut vegetation, burning cut vegetation by hand or aerial ignition device, and broadcast burning by hand or aerial ignition device. Treatments involving broadcast burning would occur mainly during spring and fall months; cutting could occur all year long. Treatments would begin in 2003 and are anticipated to be completed by 2008.

The following design features would be implemented as part of the proposed action:

- Low- to moderate-intensity prescribed fire would be used in order to promote the creation of a patchwork burn pattern of burned and unburned vegetation, and to protect soil resources.
- Where necessary, hand or "black" lines would be constructed along the perimeters of treatment units in order to contain prescribed fire within the treatment units. Hand lines and black lines are created by removing vegetation along a line by hand tools or hand burning, respectively. These lines would be constructed prior to the implementation of treatments that involve the use of prescribed burning.
- No fire lines would be constructed through known significant heritage sites. A minimum 100-foot buffer of untreated vegetation would be left around significant heritage sites. Vegetation may be cleared along the perimeter of the 100-foot buffer to exclude fire or reduce fire intensity. Prior to ignition, an archeologist would assist fire personnel to identify any other appropriate protection measures.
- Grazing pastures within treatment units would be rested from livestock grazing for a minimum of two growing seasons following a prescribed burn in that unit. Pastures would be rested for an additional season(s), where necessary to allow grasses to rejuvenate.
- Any tree cavities that are observed during cutting of pinyon or junipers will be retained for cavity nesting bird species.
- Where necessary, treated areas may be seeded to promote recovery of ground cover to protect soil resources. Seed mixes may be comprised of grass, forbs, and shrubs. Only noxious weed free seed mixes would be used.
- The Forest Service and BLM would prepare a prescribed fire burn plan for each treatment unit prior to prescribe burning. The prescribed burn plan would describe methods and conditions under which prescribed burning would occur in order to accomplish project objectives.

Table 1. Treatment Unit Name, Acreage, Vegetation Type and Proposed Treatment Method.

Unit Name	Forest Service Acreage	BLM Acreage	Existing Vegetation Types	Primary Treatment Methods
Grabalt	914	1,438	pinyon-juniper, mountain big sagebrush, gambel oak, mountain brush	Cutting and burning by hand
Wild Goose	1,581	N/A	pinyon-juniper, gambel oak, mountain brush	Prescribe burning by hand or aerial ignition device
Holden Springs	N/A	2,638	pinyon-juniper, sagebrush, gambel oak, grassland	Cutting and burning by hand
Pioneer	1,185	457	pinyon-juniper, gambel oak, mountain brush	Cutting by hand, prescribe burning by hand or aerial ignition device
Frampton Heights	N/A	490	pinyon-juniper	Cutting and pile burning by hand
Horse Hollow	2,022	N/A	pinyon-juniper, gambel oak, mountain brush	Prescribe burning by hand or aerial ignition device
Meadow	2,195	2,737	pinyon-juniper, gambel oak, mountain brush	Cutting by hand, prescribe burning by hand or aerial ignition device